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ABSTRACT

This document contains outlines of 14 presentations at a roundtable discussion on theory, policy, and practice in lifelong learning that was held during a conference on human resource development (HRD) research and practice across Europe. Outlines of the following presentations and discussions are included: "Discourses on HRD and Lifelong Learning" (Jim McGoldrick); "Interface between Policy and Practice of Lifelong Learning" (Winfried Heidemann); "Potentials of ICT for Learning" (Ian Bennet); "Introductory Note" (Jean Woodall); "Motivation to Engage in Lifelong Learning" (Ian Bennett, Winfried Heidemann, Monica Lee, Jim McGoldrick, Denise Thursfield, Jim Stewart); "Relation between Lifelong Learning and HRD" (Bob Hamlin, Winfried Heidemann, Peter Kuchinke, Jim McGoldrick, Darlene Russ-Eft, Jim Stewart, William Venables, Jean Woodall); "The Challenge of the Knowledge-Based Society" (Ian Bennett, Monica Lee, Jim McGoldrick, Claire Valentin, Anders Vind); "Concluding Note" (Gene Roth); "How Does HRD Connect with Lifelong Learning?" (Rosemary Harrison, Joseph Kessels); "How Can Organizations Foster Lifelong Learning?" (Barry Nyhan et al); "Linkage and Tension between Lifelong Learning and HRD in Europe" (Sabine Manning); "Scotland's Community Local Environment Awareness Raising Programme" (Rona Beattie, Pauline Munro); "Steel Partnership Training" (Emma Wallis, Mark Stuart, Andrew Murray); and "Union Learning Representatives" (John Rodgers, Emma Wallis, Jonathan Winterton). (MN)

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EHRD **Highlight** ☼ **Roundtable: Theory, policy and practice in lifelong learning *)**

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Conference **Fourth conference on human resource development research and practice across Europe: Lifelong learning for a knowledge based society - Toulouse 2003**

Sponsored by the University Forum for HRD (incorporating EURESFORM), the Academy of HRD and the Andorra Group. Hosted by the Centre de Recherche Européenne sur L'Emploi et les Ressources Humaines, Toulouse Business School (Groupe ESC Toulouse), Toulouse, France. Toulouse, 23-24 May 2003. Conference chairs: Jonathan Winterton & Jean Woodall

Final session **Plenary roundtable: Theory, policy and practice in lifelong learning**

Session chair: Jean Woodall
Rapporteur: Sabine Manning

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Panel statements
Jim McGoldrick: **Discourses on HRD and lifelong learning**
Winfried Heidemann: **Interface between policy and practice of lifelong learning**
Ian Bennet: **Potentials of ICT for learning**

Discussion
Introductory note (Jean Woodall)
Motivation to engage in lifelong learning
Relation between lifelong learning and HRD
The challenge of the knowledge based society
Concluding note (Gene Roth)

Related contributions
How does HRD connect with lifelong learning? (Rosemary Harrison & Joseph Kessels)
How can organisations foster lifelong learning? (Barry Nyhan et al.)
Linkage and tension between lifelong learning and HRD (Sabine Manning)

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Initiatives to promote lifelong learning:

- **Scotland's Community Local Environment Awareness Raising Programme** (Rona Beattie et al.)
- **Steel Partnership Training - UK** (Emma Wallis et al.)
- **Union Learning Representatives - UK** (John Rodgers et al.)

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EHRD **Highlight** **Roundtable: Theory, policy and practice in lifelong learning**

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Roundtable

Subject **Discourses on HRD and lifelong learning** (Jim McGoldrick)*

Outline This final session is about influencing policy and practice, but I want to start out from the theoretical issues of what we have been discussing at this conference. The approach that myself, Jim (Stewart) and Sandra (Watson) have taken in what we have written on HRD theory is about theory building or even theory modelling, but what we are trying to do is to develop modes of explanation when we are talking about theorising HRD.

What I would try to capture now is what I have been hearing at this conference about lifelong learning. One of the things that struck me in the open plenary, and that is the first time I had experienced this in any of the HRD conferences, is that the keynote speakers have been either from small business community or from the organised employee workforce committee. I think that that is already a dimension of the ideal European partnership model.

Also, as part of theorising HRD, we did a study a couple of years ago in the Academy of HRD conference, which was subsequently published, where we talked about some of the conceptual boundaries of HRD. It was all very clever, but we still kept coming back, as many of the debates on HRD and theorising HRD do come back, which is about its purpose. I think another dimension has come out of this conference about the purpose of HRD; some of the points Sabine (Manning) mentioned about the community learning.

There is still that definition from Peter Jarvis, saying lifelong learning is about work life learning. I have got one or two papers at this conference, from Rona Beattie and a colleague, about community activists. That has nothing to do with work in that sense; it's about something different, a different agenda, and that I am trying to capture.

It was Sandra (Watson) who came up with a phrase about HRD and some of the confusing language around it. HRD is characterised by what she called 'jargon ridden – meaning hidden'. We do use a meta-language to describe HRD. We try to make a space for HRD, an intellectual space amongst all the competing academic subjects and academic disciplines; and part of that is about articulating a language of HRD that allows us to express what we think it means.

What struck me about this conference from the very start was that there is a different discourse about lifelong learning, that is speaking slightly differently from what we have been used to at the more academic conferences. There has been a lot of discussion around community development, in fact societal development, but there has been as much talk about social justice as there has been about social capital. I think that is actually quite a rich idea. Also, the idea of active citizenship in the community has been as prominent a theme as some of the debates about corporate citizenship.

There is also a discourse on policy I hadn't been aware of until I

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got into that field. Embracing lifelong learning in policy terms seems to me to be fraud with difficulties, unless there is a shared understanding of what we think that it actually means. So it may well be that if the European Union would develop a framework of a European gate continent-wide for lifelong learning policy, support and resources and all the rest of it, we still don't really know what we are trying to talk around.

Another phrase that has come up in my professional domain is what is called workforce development, with the heading 'work force development and planning'. That takes us into a whole other discourse which I would personally characterise as the dead end of planning. There is also a lot of talk on contingent: the last thing they need is detailed plans. I should quote Henry Mintzberg here who said that all planning is doomed to fail because chaos is the natural order of things. To give an example of a workforce development plan: I am going to be asked as chairman of a major corporation to sign off a plan that is predicting the number of cardiologists we may need in ten years time, and the number of allied health professionals to do the diagnostic and therapy treatment in six or seven years time, because that's how long we need to train them; and we try and forecast the numbers against the population that is ageing and has complex morbidity. This is an enormous complex world, and I think we don't have an easy plan for doing that.

I was also taken by part of the paper that Jonathan (Winterton) and Martin (McCracken) presented, which is about lifelong learning and the Matthias Principle: 'to those that have will be given'. The people we are talking about, addressing complex development needs, these are well developed and extremely well educated people. Again, that struck a very resonant cord with me because I am engaged in a project at the moment looking at national strategies for leadership management in the national health service of Scotland. The people whose voices I am hearing loudest are doctors, nurses and managers, who are the best trained and the best educated sections of the workforce. One of the tasks that I have set myself is how we are going to explore the development and learning needs of the people who are beyond the reach of what can be done: porters, people who work in kitchens, people who do the medical records – these are completely ignored.

I find myself contributing to the development of a white paper, because we are just having an election in Scotland. What I think is coming into that is very much the idea that HRD, life learning to be, is most central to national policy. It's very difficult because there are fields where in some cases we are just beginning to map practice against the frame of what's going on.

There was another paper which I enjoyed very much, by John Hamblett and Denise Thursfield, about the role of interests and agency in the pursuit of HRD. The said, no – the theory is all wrong, it's not about access and inclusion; there is lots of training opportunities, companies do buy activists, but individual employees are not interested, it doesn't meet their needs, not as learners, nor as employees. It's a different view on some of the same debates, raising a lot of questions. There is almost certainly an elaborate policy machine gearing up that may be trying to address a need people don't necessarily want to have filled.

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Just a couple of comments on what I think are some of the lessons for HRD and that extended domain of lifelong learning. If there is no such thing as a job for life then our idea of life learning does assume a great significance, because it's not training for a job, it's about being able to find yourself employment. There is a famous study which concludes that disillusion in school for the majority of kids was ideal preparation for the world of work. However, there are one or two positive things from my own experience. What I see in my country is labour participation in further and higher education, there are massive opportunities provided by an organisation called Learning Direct Scotland, which is actually a brokerage service. So this is a very lively and brisk agenda on learning and development.

What I am finding interesting from this conference is that it's not about furthering corporate advance, it's actually about communities and sometimes very local agendas. So these are some of my thoughts, and I hope that colleagues will play some resonance with them.

Note *Chairman Tayside University Hospitals NHS Trust, UK

Source Recording of the presentation made at the final session (plenary roundtable) of the HRD conference in Toulouse, May 2003 (see proceedings).

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EHRD

Highlight

Roundtable: Theory, policy and practice in lifelong learning

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Roundtable

Subject

Interface between policy and practice of lifelong learning
(Winfried Heidemann)*

Outline

I would like to make some remarks about the interface between policy and practice of lifelong learning. As we have heard at this conference, lifelong learning has become a European subject, and HRD as well, in the course of the European employment strategy, especially as a follow-up of the Lisbon process. The social partners are also very deeply committed to this process, and the presentations at the opening session showed that both organisations (the European Trade Union Confederation and the European Association of Craft, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises) are engaged in this process to promote lifelong learning in the context of HRD strategies in Europe.

My special point is the strategic role of the enterprise. The implementation of European lifelong learning strategies lies at enterprise and workplace level. It is not enough only to look at schools and universities, although they can and have to do a lot in this context, but for implementing the strategy of the EU to make Europe until 2010 the most competitive space in the world in a knowledge based society, it is not only important but crucial that enterprises at workplace level contribute to what they can do for the implementation of lifelong learning.

In the context of the European social model this means, as Barry Nyhan pointed out this morning, progressing from HRM to HRD. I am very happy that this conference has not the title HRM but HRD, because I think this is a different perspective. It is the perspective leading from unilateral management models to models including all stakeholders, not only management but also the workers and the employees. Lifelong learning as a strategy of the enterprises is not only a matter of the management who has to manage processes, but also of the workers and employees.

This **chart (1)** will show you some recent access routes to lifelong learning at company level. In my organisation Hans Böckler Stiftung we have a documentation on company based works agreements (local agreements), between works councils and management. Two or three years ago we evaluated some 200 of such works agreements on continuous vocational training and lifelong learning. What we can see from these agreements, I think, is not restricted to the German experience, but can be found in most of the other European countries. On the one hand you see the traditional route to lifelong learning via the further training programmes in the large enterprises. On the other hand you find very recent routes: the assessment of training needs both of the enterprise and the individual, which is part of HRM and HRD strategies, of personnel development; also, the introduction of group work, of team work, of project organisation, and last but not least, learning in the workplace. All these processes open new gateways to lifelong learning. Learning is no longer only formal

classroom learning, but happens at the single workplace, and this workplace learning must be promoted and linked to formal ways of learning and training.

A new approach might be seen in what I call flexicurity, which means the connection between flexibility and security (see **chart 2**). HRD aims at greater flexibility of the enterprise and of the workforce. This is based and has to be based on individual commitment to the knowledge society. If you miss this important point of commitment in the long run you cannot succeed with HRD. The individual commitment to the knowledge society is deeply rooted in culture, and culture also means trust. Without some kind of security and trust you cannot motivate people to commit themselves to the knowledge society, and without this, HRD aiming at flexibility cannot succeed.

One example of the development of flexicurity can be seen in the framework agreement in the German metal industry of 2001, which shows that shift of paradigm. In this framework agreement we do not find collective rights in traditional terms of time and money resources, nor traditional rights of access to training in time. Instead, there is an individual right to regular personnel review on further industrial training needs once a year at least. This means involvement of the individual workers in the assessment of their training needs, which leads to individual agreements between the management and employees on the necessary training measures. The second individual right laid down in this framework agreement is the leave of absence for personal further training with a right to return. This means that the training measure has to be paid by the individual, but he or she has the right to return to the enterprise. This is the case, in enterprises of more than 50 employees, after seniority of at least five years.

The shift of paradigm described here consists in individualising the procedures, the rights and obligations. This individualised model is based on trust, and this trust is guaranteed in a collective agreement. We do not have much experience with this framework agreement yet, because it was agreed in summer 2001 and started at the beginning of 2002, and now is under implementation. However, I think this framework agreement can be one example for the new policy of flexicurity to which at least some social partner organisations all over Europe have committed themselves to.

Note *Hans Böckler Stiftung, Düsseldorf, Germany

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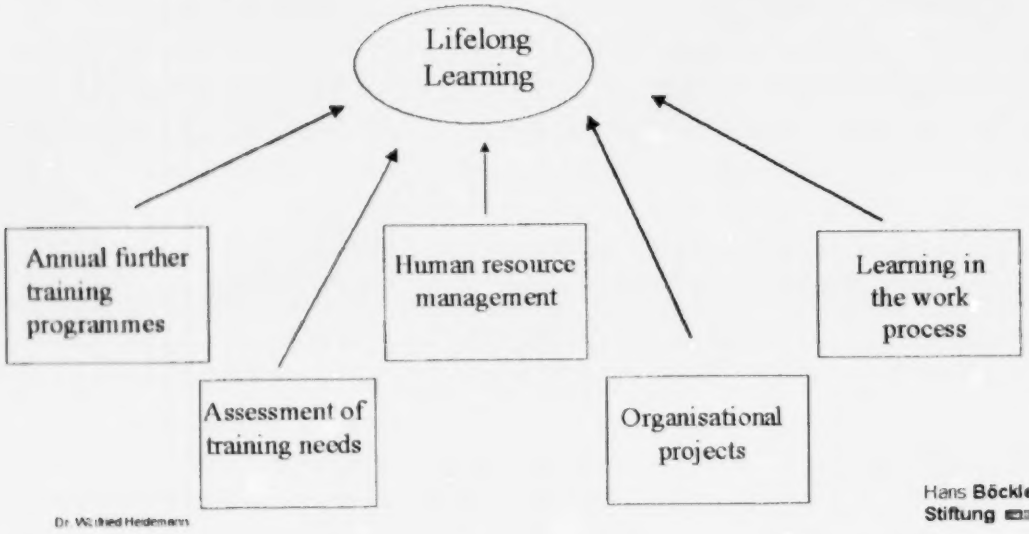
Chart 1

In-Company Routes to Lifelong Learning



Dr. Wilfried Hedemann

Hans Böckler Stiftung

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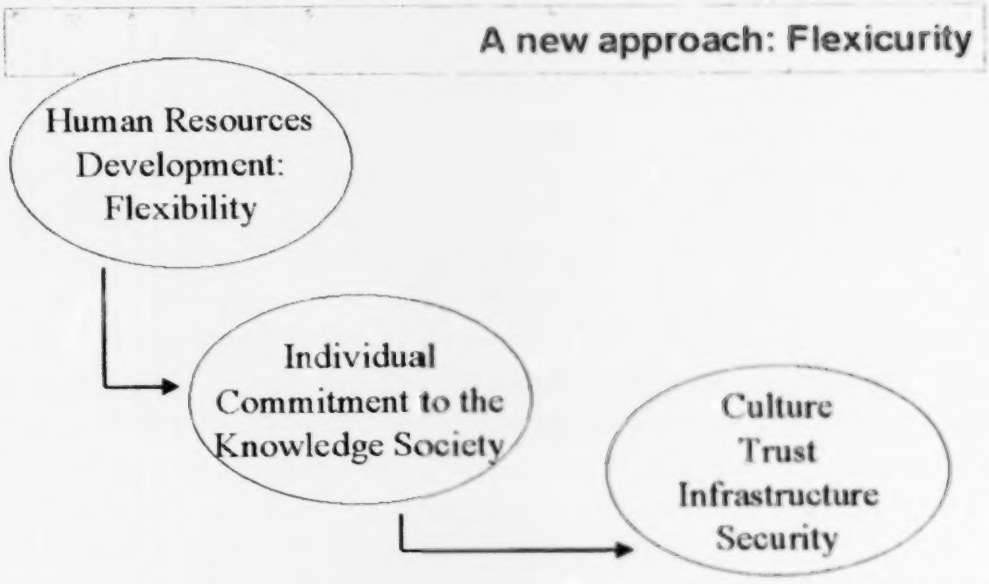
Chart 2



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Roundtable

Subject **Potentials of ICT for learning** (Ian Bennet)*

Outline

I have been invited to offer a practitioner's perspective on the implementation of ICT strategies to enhance individual and organisational learning. What I picked up from this conference shows that the business case and justification for adopting IT is still the same as before: the basics are to determine the desired outcomes and to create mobility for evaluating measures and results. Those seem to be as crucial as ever.

One of the issues we address in the beginning when implementing ICT based strategies are whether the learning is going to be separate, incidental to strategic policy, whether it can be run independently, conductive, as stand-alone, or whether it's going to entirely integrate with the organisational practices and activities. Where it is entirely integrated, for example, someone may pick up on learning about interview techniques using the intranet, if some interview is coming up. It is possible that there are also implications, for instance to determine whether someone has indeed taken that opportunity; you can trace whether they continually have to replace people. There are also some implications for the assessment of competences. Of course, learning can be modified almost as it needs be; the technology helps to determine skills gaps, to create knowledge maps, to determine what kind of learning is appropriate, to choose appropriate times of learning, to create an online record for tracing where people are with their learning and skills.

When I go back to basics, measuring the outcomes, the technology is a very useful tool for monitoring and mediating. It's possible to create mentoring sessions, virtual classrooms where somebody is learning remotely. One of the things that came across in several conference sessions is that it's still appropriate to offer support during distance learning, and mentoring is one way we are doing that, creating virtual classrooms.

There's lots of ways of using the technology to create a hybrid scenario and support people who might otherwise be left to their own devices. You can manage learning as well both from the organisation's and the individual's point of view. It's an appropriate way of re-using training material that has been created; it can of course be updated and amended frequently. One of the benefits is that it can be rewound and revisited by the learner, rather than in a passive way sitting and looking at a video or whatever. It is and should be quite an engaging and involving way of learning. Also, learning can be steered according to the progress the learner is making. It is possible to monitor, for instance, how many times people are going back over a particular topic. The mentor could intervene and offer guidance.

Accreditation is another role that technology has a lot to offer for. It's possible to set the required standards that you would need to achieve. It enables a unified approach; it can be coordinated centrally; it means the adoption of standards is much more

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prevalent; it can be deployed very quickly; it certainly can be widespread, also reaching remote people.

IT enhances and encourages collaboration. In this morning's session we talked about an organisation that had a company-wide intranet, collaborating globally using IT. There was a lot of communication across the enterprise, access to more extensive knowledge, better common understanding. So the options are greater using IT. It is just another means of delivering learning; it allows the creation of an appropriate way of learning. It's easy to use, but again should be encouraged so that people feel inclined to take it up; it should encourage the inclination to learn continually.

One of the things that came across in presentations is that motivation is on top of the list of people choosing to adopt this or not. They do need to be motivated and encouraged, and they need to be supported while they are conducting it. Also, it is a digital medium, it can be and should be interactive. There's a lot more scope in using ICT than the traditional methods; so it definitely has a role to play.

Note *Andorra Group, Harrogate, UK

Source Recording of the presentation made at the final session (plenary roundtable) of the HRD conference in Toulouse, May 2003 (see proceedings).

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EHRD **Highlight** **Roundtable: Theory, policy and practice in lifelong learning**

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Roundtable

Subject	**Introductory note** (Jean Woodall)*
Outline	Thanks to the Panel – we ought to open this up for discussion now. There has been a number of points raised. Jim McGoldrick has reminded us that our model of HRD tends to be very organisation-centred, but there are in reality many stakeholders. This is particularly important in the European context, where social partners are involved in this. Winfried Heidemann from the Hans Böcker Stiftung has given us evidence of new thinking about social partnership where traditional collective trade union framework agreements have moved in a new direction; he has reminded us none-the-less, we mustn't just forget about the organisation. And Ian Bennett has told us about the potential of information technology as an aid of assisting learning. So we have three tapes on lifelong learning in a knowledge based society; so I'd like us to try and keep up questions around these issues.
Note	*HRD Chair at Kingston Business School, UK; Editor-in-chief, HRDI
Source	Recording of the intervention made at the final session (plenary roundtable) of the HRD conference in Toulouse, May 2003 (see proceedings).
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EHRD

Highlight **Roundtable: Theory, policy and practice in lifelong learning**

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Roundtable

Subject **Motivation to engage in lifelong learning**

Context The discussion summarised below is related to the statements made by the panel group (see proceedings).

Discussion Participants: Ian Bennett UK [IB], Winfried Heidemann DE [WH], Monica Lee UK [ML], Jim McGoldrick UK [JM], Denise Thursfield UK [DTh], Jim Stewart UK [JiS]

[JiS] I've got an observation and a response. First, an alternative source, Bob Hamlin, and quote on planning. As Bob says, 'a plan is that which is changed'. Second, there is a lot of evidence in EC funded research that employees do not engage in lifelong learning and that is defined as a problem in those projects. But, why is it a problem and is their motivation the real cause if it is a problem? Winfried and Ian are offering the best solutions if the problem is employees, workers' motivation to engage in lifelong learning. But, why should they want to? And, why does that matter if they are content not to engage?

[IB] On motivation: in the presentation yesterday on ten large organisations, the learners when questioned picked motivation as the top of their list; they felt they needed to be motivated to get engaged; that's why I picked upon that point.

[JM] There is a statistic that came in the open in the plenary yesterday. In the EU there is an excess of 170 Mill. employees in SMEs. I think there is a big issue about reach. Maybe the technology is the answer, but I think Ian has said it's only a medium.

[JiS] My argument is maybe the problem is being wrongly defined. I would like to refer to John and Denise's argument in their paper at this conference. As I understand it, they are saying there are lots of opportunities and resources available to employees to engage in learning, maybe lifelong learning. So more of that is not a solution. But, why define the employees' lack of motivation to engage with the opportunities a problem, if they themselves don't? If they haven't wanted all of the opportunities etc. why blame them for not using them?

[IB] An organisation has a need to implement skills; learning is a process; they have an obligation to maintain skills; and people are employed on the basis of qualifications; they have got years to go; it's little use to take the traditional learning and stick it on the web; this is unlikely to motivate, and it doesn't make use of what is possible.

[WH] I think motivation is not only a matter of human beings; also organisations have to be motivated to learn and to change. As we

all know, not only human being are conservative, but also organisations are conservative, and the bigger they are the more conservative they came to be. So I think the point is to establish mechanisms which allow organisations to undergo training and to learn, and which also allow individuals to learn, to change themselves in their environment.

[DTh] I'm just a little bit concerned about the focus on individual motivation. That's not what this paper was about. I think that the reasons why people do not participate in learning are much more complex than their amount of motivation. I think research needs to look at the material structures in which people live and work, and we need some understanding of the contextual power relations within which people are expected to engage in these learning programmes. It's not about motivation, its about the material structures of capitalism.

[WH] One answer: We made an analysis of a database in Germany on individual participation in continued vocational training. The result of this multivariate analysis was that individuals engage in continued training if they have the impression that they can use it. That helps them that there is an outcome. If they do not have this impression, if they are forced to learn and to participate, if they do not find that it is something for themselves, for their career or for themselves personally, then they are not engaged to participate in training and learning.

[JM] Can I come back: I think Denise has made an interesting point. I used to teach sociology at work, which is why are people motivated or not motivated. Because, if you can capture the essence of what motivation is, you can solve all the problems of productivity. If I remember from all of the literature, sometimes people are motivated extrinsically, they do that for the money and do think that's enough. There are some people who buy into learning opportunities because they change with what they want to do, to change at a certain time in their life, and a certain time in their career. There are other people who just not bother; they don't care about flexicurity, the world doesn't appear to them in those terms.

What a colleague of mine and I found, over a number of years on a programme of lifelong learning within the company NCR, was a very complex network of reasons. There were enormous benefits to employees if they engaged in education for all, in training and development and educational opportunity that broadly related to the work, not specifically to the job. There were technicians who upgraded to engineers, engineers went on the managerial courses, senior professionals ended up doing doctorates. An interesting finding was the argument about mutuality: the employees benefited and the company benefited; the company benefited by a highly skilled group of people remaining with them and not leaving. But there was a large population also in that company who didn't bother. I wish I knew the answer to that; they didn't see it as something for them; the opportunity was there, but they didn't feel that they had to take this up. so I think it's somehow an

unanswerable question.

[ML] That reminds me of work that a PhD student was writing. What she did was to look at the career progression of employees in the financial sector who are responsible for caring for others. One of the findings was that, although there were development opportunities available to them and lifelong learning policies in place, many people did not make use of them. This was partly because of lack of time, but also .it was heavily influenced by the attitudes of the supervisors and line managers. Some people talked of the way or manner in which supervisors answered their requests as being off-putting... Just because something is right, or is available, doesn't mean that it is socially acceptable to make use of it. I think there's something about organisational culture as well as policy and practice.

[IB] In a study we did on the best companies to work for, the employees are not claiming that they are better paid; what comes out at the top each time is that there is a good environment for work, which encourages them.

Source — Recording of the discussion at the final session (plenary roundtable) of the HRD conference in Toulouse, May 2003 (see proceedings).

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Roundtable

Highlight

Roundtable: Theory, policy and practice in lifelong learning

Subject **Relation between lifelong learning and HRD**

Context The discussion summarised below is related to the statements made by the panel group (see proceedings).

Discussion Participants: Bob Hamlin UK [BH], Winfried Heidemann DE [WH], Peter Kuchinke US [PK], Jim McGoldrick UK [JM], Darlene Russ-Eft US [DR], Jim Stewart UK [JiS], William Venables US [WV], Jean Woodall UK [JeW]

[PK] I would be interested in the panel's view on what are the distinguishing characteristics between lifelong learning and HRD, because it's fuzzy in my mind. I'm living in a country with a much different, or some would say non-existent, model of social partnership. Winfried talked about the role of organisations in lifelong learning; that is close to what concerns HRD. Are there other aspects that lifelong learning has, that supersede perhaps HRD? So what is it exactly?

[JM] Let me kick off by bringing together two strands of an argument here. There is an undertone of the prototype that is agreeable to competitive advantage in a knowledge economy. Then there is a competitive advantage to be gained by having smart people, or people who are better trained, or adaptable and ready to learn. If you are moving from manufacturing to service economy that may be a very important thing. I come from a fairly small country which is trying to say that one of the greatest resources it has are its people, with a very sophisticated system of further and higher education to serve a highly educated population, relative to some other countries.

What we've also got is lifelong learning as a construct to carry too much. So there's the whole competitive advantage of nations linked with it. There is also the thing about citizenship and community, because some of the contradictions of advanced economies is that there are some places you would not want to live in. So I would part with Peter that it's fuzzy. I think that one of the risks is to try and nail it down and make it clear, because lifelong learning is so ambiguous in terms of its meaning that it fits perfectly with the ambiguity of what HRD means.

[PK] Yet you describe it in terms of country level and development rather that organisation and specific institutional level -

[JM] I was only making that point that in a small country of 5 Mill. people the feeling among the government is that it can be done, because there are 20 higher education institutions that can talk to each other, there are only a dozen enterprise companies, there is not a big manufacturing base any more. ... I still think that it has been asked to carry too much weight.

[WH] Sabine has made the point in her brief presentation that lifelong learning is viewed from the side of the individual - lifelong learning of human beings, and HRD is a collectivist view from the organisation. Organisations aim at certain outcomes, in their view human beings are human resources. If we speak of the policy of lifelong learning, this is a point to organise, to develop structures which are able to learn. I think the two sides, lifelong learning of human beings and HRD as a collectivist view, have to be brought together.

[JeW] I wonder whether there are any contributions that are more concrete, which people would like to take up. There is an issue of principle, there is also an issue of implementation and practice, and I think that's what are the real problems. We have so many aspirations around HRD and what it could possibly be, yet we are faced with evidence of that contradiction.

[JiS] Just a point to help out Peter's understanding. In our European research we viewed HRD as primarily an organisation function contributing, or not, to facilitating, supporting and promoting lifelong learning. So, societies want their individual citizens to be lifelong learners and HRD can have a role in achieving that.

[JM] It's a very astute observation. There is a point that Sally Sambrook once made about the fact that we talked HRD into existence y having meetings like this. It doesn't exist in a concrete form, it has different meanings depending on where you are. Monica (Lee) has made a few theses to define it and wins prizes for so doing. I think the European government has much gone to the idea of lifelong learning as being somehow important, without being able to capture what the essence of that importance is. If you talk about company based programmes of development, you've got to look alongside the idea that there is no job for life, the flexicurity, the bits that Winfried had raised in his contribution. I think that's devastating; the natural order of things is tension and paradox. That's my worry, a point to be controversial, that it gets into the policy machine, and then resources go into it, and we still don't know what it really is.

[BH] It seems to me there is one word that can be used to sum it all up: performance. We have been talking about what a nation is; one can think of a nation essentially as being made up of organisations: public, private and not for profit. Ideally all should be high performing, with the profit making organisations capable of competing effectively in the global economy; but high performing organisations are made up of high performing teams and groups; ideally these are made up of high performing individuals who subscribe to the goals of the organisation, and therefore engage in lifelong learning that helps them perform and maximise their contribution to achieving the aims of their organisation. The challenge for HRD is to help everyone see the connection between learning and high performance.

[DR] One controversy is whether the focus of HRD is performance or learning. Although some researchers concentrate on one or the other, both are important to organisations. The second issue is whether we – the research community – have talked HRD into existence. Frankly, there are other fields that have been talked into existence: These include many of the social sciences -- psychology being one, sociology being another. So what's wrong with talking into existence HRD?

[JM] I wasn't making a critical comment. I think that one of the things we tried to articulate is to define that space. I am a sociologist originally, and I remember a really great conference where the British Sociological Association presented this argument which was called 'space for sociology', because it was a new field which had to make its way. I think it's when we make exclusive claims to knowledge rights, that raises questions.

[WV] I would like to come back to Darlene's question: it's learning; lifelong learning is for the individual, HRD is for the organisation; so it's learning for the individual, it's performance for the organisation. We have to have learning in order to have performance. But I think, basically, it's more about cultural constructs going back to Hofstede, and time perspective. HRD that leads to a crude performance today or making a profit today, can also lead to shortcuts in terms of performance. If you have a longer perspective, the thing that really matters is that specific performance requires learning. It's the learning that leads to viable, longer term investment in individuals and groups, and that is increasing the technical performance today, but focusing always on learning, in terms of development both for the organisation and the individual.

[JM] I agree with a lot of that. It strikes me that there is almost a dialectic: there is episodic learning, at schools, colleges etc, programmes that we do to advance specific skills; and there is experiential or personal learning, which is about learning that we do by living; that's about ourselves as persons; whether we are motivated to do or not, we learn every day. What we are trying to bring into one is the properties of the other. Sometimes you think about what episodic learning would I need that would be about enhancing my capability to make a living. I think that, because we learn stronger in the other domain, the employers are trying to get that. This is a very complex interplay that, when you provide people the opportunity to do something creative it's not always going to be for the organisation.

[WV] And just in time training, that never leads to high performance, since everything needs a specific context, a process.

Source — Recording of the discussion at the final session (plenary roundtable) of the HRD conference in Toulouse, May 2003 (see proceedings).

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Roundtable

Highlight **Roundtable: Theory, policy and practice in lifelong learning**

Subject **The challenge of the knowledge based society**

Context The discussion summarised below is related to the statements made by the panel group (see proceedings).

Discussion Participants: Ian Bennett UK [IB], Monica Lee UK [ML], Jim McGoldrick UK [JM], Claire Valentin UK [CV], Anders Vind DK [AV]

[CV] I'm thinking of the title of the conference, which is Lifelong Learning and the Knowledge Based Society. I agree with earlier speakers that lifelong learning is very much policy driven; but there are questions about it, it tends to promote an individual deficit model of learning, that individuals are unable to contribute to the knowledge-based society because of these deficiences, which must be addressed by education or training. But this ignores structural reasons affecting people's participation in the labour market : discrimination, marginalisation, the impact on companies of trends in the global economy. We need to strive to examine and critique the underlying assumptions operating in HRD policy and practice. We are trying to get individuals and organisations to contribute to the knowledge based society, to make Europe more globally competitive, but what are the assumptions operating here? Examining alternate conceptions may help us to find new ways of viewing the complex problems that we face. We need to consider what questions we should be asking, rather than simply looking for answers.

[JM] Can I come in with a micro-level example of what I understand a knowledge based society to be. I saw a study recently which was conducted by a firm of consultants from San Francisco, an examination of the Baltimore economy. The combination of the John Hopkins Institute and the John Hopkins university was what drove the local economy, the regional economy. There was a significant multiplied effect: when you look into the spending of pensions, not just the salaries and obvious things, but the impact on the construction industry and all of those. That's what I understand that knowledge becomes something determined to economic activity and success.

I have a very strong personal interest in coming from a region in Scotland which was formally manufacturing based. It has been in decline for a considerable period of time and is loosing population. What would save that, I think, would be very attractive high technology based jobs around biotechnology and biomedical sciences linked into two or three local universities. Because then you can pay premium salaries, you are boosting the property market and all of those things.

What's coming to us in terms of questions is how do we understand this knowledge economy, because if it's good about knowledge then it has to be good about learning and the acquisition and transmission of that knowledge. So we have more complex

questions to formulate as opposed to looking for easy solutions.

[IB] We had an example in a session this morning where a global organisation realised, at the end of the day, there was the knowledge within the organisation and the application of it. They set up a technological race, a solution for sharing that knowledge. You may debate on the definition whatever, but certainly commercial organisations recognise that knowledge is the key.

[JM] There's a good example where I live: the main manufacturing firm is NCR; ten years ago this was the centre for the manufacture of machines; they are not interested in that any more; what they want is R&D facility for NCR.

[ML] I understand this very differently; from those who equate lifelong learning with improving performance. For me it seems that lifelong learning is about developing the educated person in the classical sense – someone who is interested in life and continues to explore the mental world until they die. It goes beyond the world of work to those without permanent employment and into retirement. It has its roots in the development of society, and so it is a long-term enterprise.

We must remember that ultimately society seeks to improve the life of its members. This includes the quality of mental life and culture as well as fulfilling the basic survival security and comfort needs. At present we use the rhetoric of competition to say this is the way to improve quality of life, but it is only a means to an end. If we forget the societal drive and focus on performance improvement, then the mechanism for that is competition and short term gain. The mechanism for societal development, however, is for individuals to continue to develop throughout their lives, and so continue to contribute to an active and enquiring society whilst also improving the mental aspects of quality of life... There is, of course, a lot of sub-text in this – for example, it assumes that people want the opportunity to continue learning throughout life. I suppose what I am saying is that life-long learning is a political activity and makes some assumptions about what society should be like ...

[AV] Just three small observations. First, this relates to the national competition or regional competition. We have got statistics that more than 50 per cent, this is the majority of the employees in the private sector in Denmark, is employed by international corporations; these are linked to what's going on at a global level; so that much for a national strategy or maybe a European strategy.

Second, about the contradictory concepts we are discussing. We have to be very critical every time there is action based on a general reference in accordance with the idea of lifelong learning, the knowledge based society or whatever, because that's no argument on such a fuzzy concept; one has to discuss any individual approach at action level.

Finally, this tension between the individual and social dimension of citizenship and the organisational or employability side of lifelong learning. One of the most dangerous conclusions in that paradox or ambivalence would be to leave the learning for the organisation to

the organisation as such; it's very crucial for the individual or for social aspects that we are very much engaged in training and development within the companies and in an organisation; it's not a contradiction to individual development to have to learn in the workplace or in relation to a job; it's very crucial for individual fulfilment and individual development to participate in a public activity and to contribute to the wealth of society.

Source — Recording of the discussion at the final session (plenary roundtable) of the HRD conference in Toulouse, May 2003 (see proceedings).

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EHRD **Highlight** **Roundtable: Theory, policy and practice in lifelong learning**

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Roundtable

Subject	**Concluding note** (Gene Roth)*
Outline	I am the speaker you are all waiting for: the last one! Conferences such as this one allow us to entertain research ideas from scholars who span boundaries with their thinking. A couple of comments resonated with me. The first one is something that Peter (Kuchinke) stated, that HRD is a very complex concept, and its paradoxes within theory and practice seem to increase exponentially as we try to discuss it across cultures. For this reason, I am grateful to Jonathan (Winterton) and others who organised this conference. This event allowed several highly regarded scholars from various countries to come together to discuss HRD and lifelong learning. The second idea that I would like to note was a request made by Kiran (Trehan). She urged us to question the invisible processes within HRD that have become habitual and accepted by both practitioners and theorists. This conference may very well be the launching point for a group of scholars who want to critically look at HRD and question some of its underlying assumptions. This conference has been truly invigorating -- I am looking forward to seeing you all in Ireland in 2004!
Note	*President, Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD), US
Source	Recording of the intervention made at the final session (plenary roundtable) of the HRD conference in Toulouse, May 2003 (see proceedings).
Descriptors	

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Editor: **Sabine Manning** © WIFO

EHRD

Highlight **Roundtable: Theory, policy and practice in lifelong learning**

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Roundtable

Subject **How does HRD connect with lifelong learning?** (Rosemary Harrison & Joseph Kessels)

Outline In our view, HRD as an organisational process comprises the skilful planning and facilitation of a variety of formal and informal learning and knowledge processes and experiences, primarily but not exclusively in the workplace, in order that organisational progress and individual potential can be enhanced through the competence, adaptability, collaboration and knowledge-creating activity of all who work for the organisation.

Our definition reflects a perspective on HRD that is in accord with the current macro-level policy emphasis on lifelong learning and development. One of the main tasks of public funded education is to invest in the development of a high level workforce. Across the European Community the need to invest heavily in human capital has for over a decade expressed itself in a drive for life-long learning.

How does HRD connect with the European lifelong learning agenda?

- By accepting the need for the development of human capital to be a shared responsibility: Within organisations the learning, and the development of knowledge on which economic and social well-being greatly depend should be pursued through a partnership process.
- By focusing on the development of social as well as human capital: In organisations where the tacit dimension of knowledge and its social construction form a vital source of competitive advantage the HRD investment should be focused strongly on the building of social capital, which is to do with the interactions of all workers in an organisation.
- By recognising the primacy of organisational context: HRD policies within the firm are most powerfully shaped by top management's visions and values, by management style and actions, by HR strategies and practice and by the employment system of the firm. So HRD activity should be integrated with wider HR and business practice in order to achieve its goals.

We conclude that the emergence of a knowledge economy offers exciting opportunities to the HRD profession, and to those involved in the education and continuing development of its members. We believe that the primary task is to work with organisational stakeholders to create a synergy between the learning, development and knowledge-creating capability of all organisational members, the thrust of strategising and organising, and the progress of the organisation as its boundaries grow ever more fluid in a turbulent world.

Source Selected passages from the authors' notes and paper "Human resource development: Key organisational process in a knowledge economy" prepared for presentation at the HRD conference in Toulouse, May 2003 (see proceedings and catalogue of references: Harrison et al. 2003/ Harrison et al. 2003a)

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Highlight

Roundtable: Theory, policy and practice in lifelong learning

Subject

How can organisations foster lifelong learning? (Barry Nyhan et al.)

Outline

The European political educational goals of 'lifelong learning' and the creation of 'knowledge societies' or 'knowledge economies' can only be attained if the organisations in which people work are also organisations in which they are learning. So, work organisations must become, at the same time, learning organisations.

In order to build learning organisations, one has to ensure that a) there is coherence between the 'tangible' (formal/objective) and the 'intangible' (informal/subjective) dimensions of an organisation; and b) that the organisation's learning' goals are reconciled with individuals' learning needs. The complexity involved in ensuring the right balance between these different dimensions, means that in the final analysis one cannot realistically expect more than incomplete or imperfect learning organisations. However, this does not in any way negate the validity of the quest to reconcile these competing but 'real' interests.

Up to recent years, learning organisation theory tended to have a strategic management orientation without being concerned with an analysis of how workers could contribute to, or benefit from, organisational learning. However, the new agenda calls for the development of learning theories that can engage all of the actors and interest groups in multidisciplinary research and development work. Clearly the education dimension must be integrated in the new agenda in the context of building learning organisation that foster lifelong learning. This is a complex matter requiring willingness to change and an openness to boundary-crossing between management thinkers, organisational specialists, educationalists and others.

The European concept of the learning organisation must bring educational benefits to individuals as well as strengthening the organisational effectiveness of enterprises and public bodies. Europe, conceived as a 'locality', can draw on its own distinctive traditional strengths to shape its future course and build new European learning organisations. This entails learning from its past history but also developing a capacity to be prospective in identifying and facing up to the issues on the new agenda.

Source

Selected passages from the authors' paper prepared for presentation at the HRD conference in Toulouse, May 2003 (see proceedings and catalogue of references: Nyhan et al. 2003)

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EHRD Portal
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Roundtable

Linkage and tension between lifelong learning and HRD in Europe

Contrasting thematic areas of the LLL Base and the EHRD Base

Sabine Manning

Presentation at the Roundtable of the HRD Conference in Toulouse, 24 May 2003 (see proceedings)

Figures > 1 > 2 > 3 > 4 > 5 > 6

In collaboration with European researchers I have developed two knowledge bases: one about lifelong learning in Europe (LLL Base) and another one about human resource development in Europe (EHRD Base). Each of these two knowledge bases emerged in a specific context:

- The LLL Base, designed in cooperation with CEDEFOP, started out from issues related to the EU Memorandum on lifelong learning (2001). Its aim was to highlight results of research and policy analysis, with a focus on challenges for vocational education and training.
- The EHRD Base was created in collaboration with a cluster of research projects supported under the Fourth and Fifth Framework programmes of the EU. Its aim was to bring together research results, and stimulate interaction among researchers, in areas related to HRD in Europe.

These two knowledge bases have been produced and maintained completely separate from each other. What they have in common, though, is a thematic approach: each knowledge base is built on a conceptual field with interrelated themes of research. The two knowledge bases may therefore provide interesting perspectives on linkages and tensions between the thematic fields of lifelong learning and human resource development in Europe.

The following figures have been prepared to highlight the thematic relationship between these two knowledge bases (the explanatory text below is also attached to each page showing the figure concerned).

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Context and process of lifelong learning in Europe (Figure 1)

Lifelong learning, as perceived in the LLL Base, is centred on the individual life cycle, in liaison with the processes of learning and working. The related context is defined by the triangle of community, education and profession.

Context and field of human resource development in Europe (Figure 2)

Human resource development in the EHRD Base is described as a broad field of activities, involving professionals, managers and workers. The focus of interest in these HRD activities is the organisation.

Individual <-> Organisation (Figure 3)

Two different focal points have been identified in the conceptual fields of LLL and HRD: the individual and the organisation. While these may imply contrasting concepts, there are also close linkages between these two. The interrelation or shift of emphasis between the individual and the organisation, between LLL and HRD, have been addressed as challenges. Two quotations by Petr Jarvis and Barry Nyhan, selected from the knowledge bases (Jarvis 2002 and Nyhan et al. 2003), may illustrate this tension.

Areas of LLL in Europe (Figure 4)

Issues of lifelong learning have grouped according to five thematic areas: developing competences/ skills and learning environments, offering information/ guidance and facilitating bridges/ pathways in the education system, and providing frameworks/ incentives for lifelong learning.

Areas of HRD in Europe (Figure 5)

European HRD, as a broad concept, includes the following thematic areas: human resource development/ management (HRD) in particular, linked with DO), continuing vocational training (CVT), knowledge management (KM), work-based learning (WBL) and learning in organisations/ organisational learning (LO).

Relationship between areas of LLL and HRD (Figure 6)

The two sets of thematic areas identified for LLL and HRD respectively seem to be fairly distinct and different in terminology. However, if the processes (e.g. managing, guiding, learning) which underpin these terms are considered, the areas can be related to each other. For this purpose, the two sets of thematic areas have been arranged as a continuum between two complementing processes: 'facilitation' and 'learning'.

By contrasting the thematic areas of LLL and HRD in this way, and considering the rich evidence of the knowledge bases behind these themes, the following pattern emerges: while there is a week relationship between thematic areas concerned with the facilitation of LLL and HRD respectively, the relationship between areas focusing on the learning process turns out to be strong.

This outcome is significant in underlining a message expressed in several contributions to this conference: both in the context of LLL and HRD, the learning process is addressed as a central concern of research and practice.

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Author: **Sabine Manning** © WIFO

European Training Village

Lifelong learning

A pilot resource base of current European research

LLL Research Base (update 2003)

Editors: Sabine Manning and Martina Ní Cheallaigh

Introduction

Research Forum WIFO Berlin

Thematic areas

Bridges and pathways

Competences and skills

Learning environments

Information and guidance

Frameworks and incentives

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New> **Theory, policy and practice in lifelong learning**
(proceedings of a roundtable at the HRD conference in Toulouse, 2003)

The LLL Research Base belongs to a group of thematic resource bases on the WIFO site including the following:

Human resource development in Europe (EHRD Base)	Continuing vocational training in Denmark (CVT Base)	**Qualifications for employment and higher education (DUOQUAL Base)**	Enhancing the attractiveness of vocational education (**Finnbase**)

>>> Search all thematic resource bases on the WIFO site <<<

For more information on lifelong learning research please view the
Signpost to LLL research in Europe

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Welcome to the EHRD Portal www.ehrd-portal.org !

Here you can find research based information on human resource development (HRD) in Europe. The major resources of the EHRD Base, as described below, are accessible from the navigation column on the left.

< Review of **debate** on HRD in Europe
< Outline of the European **perspective** of HRD
< Survey on **project** results related to HRD in Europe
< Catalogue of **references** to publications on HRD in Europe
< **Who's who** in European HRD: a directory of experts

Update

> Just published: the proceedings of the roundtable on lifelong learning at the UFHRD conference in Toulouse 2003

> In connection with the recent UFHRD conference in Toulouse you may view the resource base on lifelong learning in Europe (LLL Base).

> The University Forum for HRD and the Research Forum WIFO have agreed to collaborate in the further development of the EHRD Base > more

View EHRD Base

This pilot base is being developed in collaboration with the **University Forum of HRD** and the wider **EHRD Network**. More than 400 experts are already involved, with a mailing list facilitating interaction between the network and the resource base. You are welcome to participate in this initiative.

University Forum for HRD

Research Forum (WIFO)

Contact:
Sabine Manning, WIFO Berlin
Editor of the EHRD Base and coordinator of the EHRD Network
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NOTE: The up-to-date flyer of the EHRD Base is available for printing (preferably in horizontal format).

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Figures
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Figure 1

Lifelong learning, as perceived in the LLL Base, is centred on the individual life cycle, in liaison with the processes of learning and working. The related context is defined by the triangle of community, education and profession.

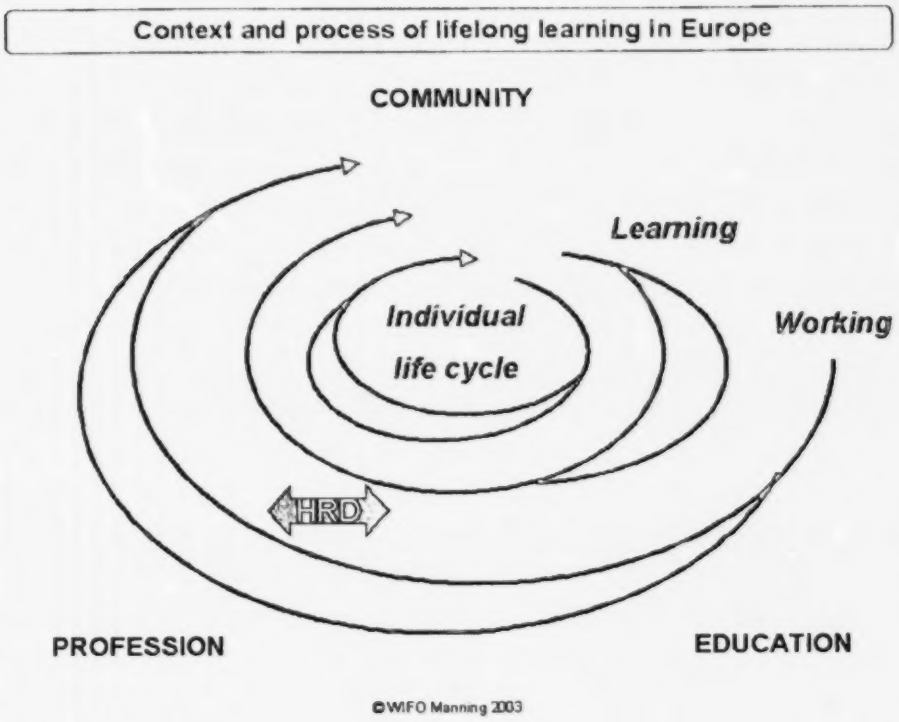

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Figure 2

Human resource development in the EHRD Base is described as a broad field of activities, involving professionals, managers and workers. The focus of interest in these HRD activities is the organisation.

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Figure 3

Two different focal points have been identified in the conceptual fields of LLL and HRD: the individual and the organisation. While these may imply contrasting concepts, there are also close linkages between these two. The interrelation or shift of emphasis between the individual and the organisation, between LLL and HRD, have been addressed as challenges. Two quotations by Petr Jarvis and Barry Nyhan, selected from the knowledge bases (Jarvis 2002 and Nyhan et al. 2003), may illustrate this tension.

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Individual
Organisation
The term **lifelong learning** has effectively come to mean work life learning, and people have become human capital who need to be developed so that they can play their role in the work force more effectively. (Jarvis)
The challenge faced by European organisations is to become **learning organisations** that promote competitiveness goals as well as foster the human development of all their members. (Nyhan)
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Figure 4

Issues of lifelong learning have grouped according to five thematic areas: developing competences/ skills and learning environments, offering information/ guidance and facilitating bridges/ pathways in the education system, and providing frameworks/ incentives for lifelong learning.

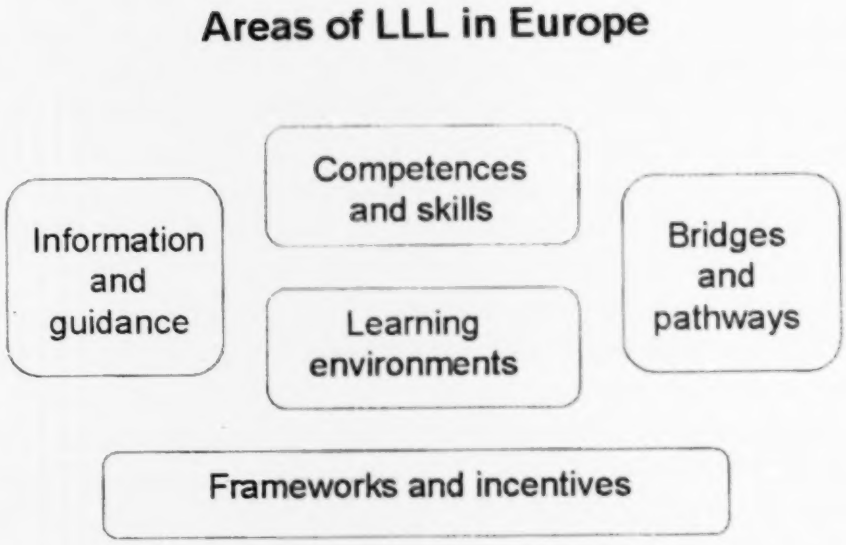

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Figure 5

European HRD, as a broad concept, includes the following thematic areas: human resource development/ management (HRD) in particular, linked with DO), continuing vocational training (CVT), knowledge management (KM), work-based learning (WBL) and learning in organisations/ organisational learning (LO).

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Figure 6

The two sets of thematic areas identified for LLL and HRD respectively can be related to each other. For this purpose, the two sets of thematic areas have been arranged as a continuum between two complementing processes: 'facilitation' and 'learning'.

By contrasting the thematic areas of LLL and HRD in this way, and considering the rich evidence of the knowledge bases behind these themes, the following pattern emerges: while there is a week relationship between thematic areas concerned with the facilitation of LLL and HRD respectively, the relationship between areas focusing on the learning process turns out to be strong.

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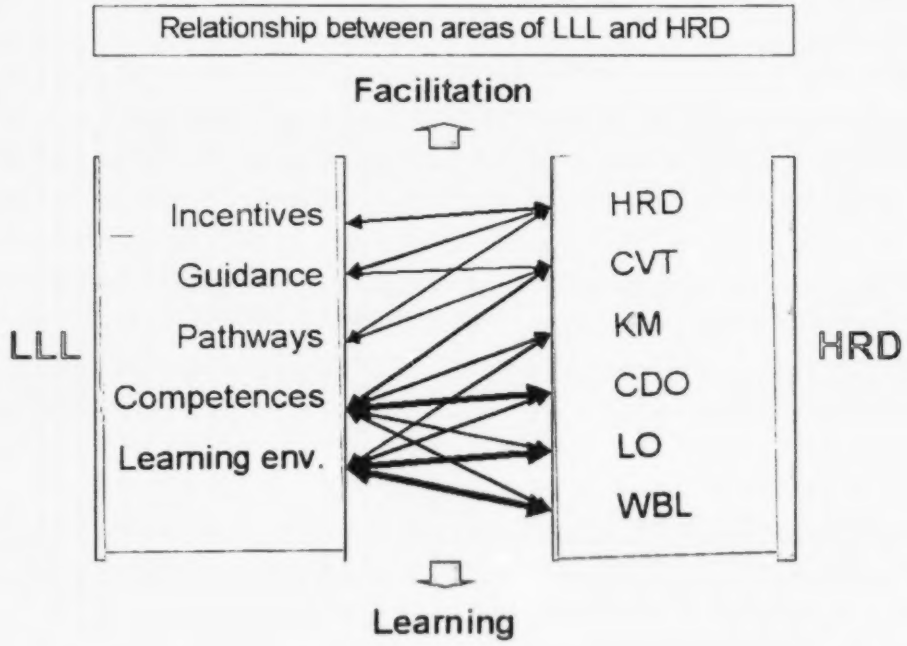

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EHRD **Highlight** **Roundtable: Theory, policy and practice in lifelong learning**

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Roundtable

Subject **Scotland's Community Local Environment Awareness Raising Programme** (Rona Beattie & Pauline Munro)

Outline The Community Local Environment Awareness Raising Programme (CLEAR) is an innovative training and capacity-building programme, provided by Planning Aid for Scotland (PAS). The programme, designed to enable more effective participation in land planning issues that affect local communities, provides a community-based approach to lifelong.

PAS is a voluntary organisation run by qualified and experienced town planners who voluntarily give free advice and information on all aspects of town and country planning and related issues to individuals, community councils, tenants associations and voluntary organisations. PAS believes that the CLEAR programme was necessary because many people feel excluded from the planning system. Excluded not because people don't have the right to participate but because the system is complex and they need to express their views in planning terms if they are to have any effect.

The aim of CLEAR is to encourages people to get more involved in community activities by enabling community groups and activists to make a meaningful contribution to the local consultation period on the local or structure plan, and to empower the participants with lifelong skills of disseminating and understanding information which is normally outside the experience of the lay person.

The CLEAR programme operates in two stages:

1. Community groups prepare for learning about the planning process by identifying issues that concern them. This is facilitated by the CLEAR Programme Manager.
2. Community Training Workshops – individuals and community groups attend a one day training event tailored to respond to the issues raised in the first stage.

It can be argued that the CLEAR project contributes to enabling communities to influence their futures. Of particular value to communities is the impartiality and independence of the advice provided by PAS as a neutral body. By sharing knowledge and developing awareness, CLEAR empowers those in the community to adopt courses of action previously unknown to them. An example of this could be lodging a planning objection to a development which could have negative implications for their community. These interim findings therefore suggest that community groups and individuals have been able to apply new knowledge, adding to the social capital of their locality, and enabling them to reclaim a stake in their community.

Source Selected passages from the authors' paper "Learning to plan, planning to learn: evaluating a community based approach to

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lifelong learning" presented at the HRD conference in Toulouse, May 2003 (see proceedings)

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EHRD

Highlight

Roundtable: Theory, policy and practice in lifelong learning

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Roundtable

Subject

Steel Partnership Training - UK (Emma Wallis, Mark Stuart & Andrew Murray)

Outline

During recent decades restructuring within the UK steel industry has required employees to have a broader range of skills. Restructuring has, however, also highlighted the need for workers to embrace lifelong learning in order to increase their employability by gaining transferable skills.

The trade unioin ISTC took the decision to facilitate the development of training and learning opportunities for steel industry employees themselves, and Steel Partnership Training (SPT) was established in order to fulfil this role: to promote lifelong learning within steel communities, and learning opportunities for displaced workers.

SPT sometimes provides training directly, but more often the organisation facilitates the provision of learning opportunities for workers within the steel and metal sector, by drawing down funding from European and UK government sources in order to run projects that enable partnerships of local employers, colleges, and other training providers to develop tailored learning opportunities for displaced workers, and those under threat of redundancy. Each local partnership therefore involves different actors reflecting local circumstances and priorities.

SPT addresses the training and learning agenda on a number of levels. Whilst some of the local learning partnerships have developed in response to plant level closures or restructuring, and therefore have the objective of facilitating redundant steel and metal sector workers gaining transferable skills which will increase their employability in the labour market beyond the steel and metal sector, other learning partnerships, have been instituted in order to promote lifelong learning, especially within workplace settings where workers are likely to be facing redundancy. A third group of learning partnerships however, have emerged in order to attempt to bridge the gap between the trade union and the employer agendas with respect to training and learning.

The activities of SPT raise questions about whether the workplace or the community is the most appropriate locus for trade union activity in the field of learning. It could be argued that SPT's community based initiatives for displaced workers have enabled learning opportunities to be developed that reflect the needs of labour to a greater extent than those developed within the workplace. This however, perhaps reflects that workers displaced from, and those remaining within, the steel industry have a different relationship with the labour market, and that the workplace, unlike the community is a contested arena for learning.

By outlining a number of key projects and innovations advanced by SPT, the paper highlights some of the benefits that can accrue from such a trade union-led strategy. However, given the imperatives of capitalist restructuring and the contradictory

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dynamics of SPT's strategy and practice, the case reveals some of the key challenges that trade unions face in engaging with the lifelong learning agenda.

Source — Selected passages from the authors' paper "A trade union-led partnership for lifelong learning in the UK steel industry: Meaningful collaboration or complicity with the objectives of capital?" presented at the HRD conference in Toulouse, May 2003 (see proceedings)

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EHRD

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Roundtable

Subject

Union Learning Representatives - UK (John Rodgers, Emma Wallis & Jonathan Winterton)

Outline

The Union Learning Representatives is an initiative by the UK Trades Union Congress. The initiative seeks to promote workplace learning through equipping local union representatives to negotiate learning provision and to provide information, advice and guidance on learning opportunities to co-workers.

In recent years many of the largest and most influential trade unions within the UK have placed increasing emphasis on learning in general, and in the recruitment and training of Union Learning Representatives (ULRs) in particular. Over 4,500 ULRs have been trained in order both to promote learning within the workplace, and offer advice and guidance on learning opportunities to their colleagues. ULRs have been highly successful with respect to promoting learning within the workplace, facilitating increased participation in learning by members of those groups traditionally under-represented in learning activities, and promoting approaches to learning within the workplace based upon social partnership.

Furthermore, the recent establishment of community based ULRs and the growing interest in the concept of community unionism within unions such as Amicus and ISTC, suggests that the unions themselves recognise the potential for addressing the social inclusion agenda by extending the benefits of the ULR initiative to the economically inactive.

There is evidence that ULRs have experienced some success in promoting the broader concept of lifelong learning endorsed by the European Commission, which embraces learning activities undertaken within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective, as opposed to the narrower view of learning held by many employers, which places more emphasis on the acquisition of task or firm specific skills to facilitate job competence.

Mainstream approaches to HRD routinely neglect the plurality of the workplace and fail to consider the employee relations implications of HRD. In examining the ULR initiative, the potential conflict of interest between employers and workers is highlighted and the important role of trade unions is exposed. While the Employment Act 2002 provided statutory backing for learning representatives, this falls short of a statutory right to bargain over training, let alone a right to access to training as exists in several other EU Member States. Nevertheless, on the evidence to date, this development is likely to be of pivotal importance for improving trade union effectiveness in influencing HRD and learning opportunities in the workplace, especially for groups at risk of social exclusion, such as low skilled and older workers, who are less likely to have engaged in (recent) learning activities.

While it is too early for a comprehensive evaluation of their impact, case study evidence and the results of interim evaluation

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for the Government and the TUC, suggests that they offer a potential good practice example of social partnership to promote learning at work.

Source — Selected passages from the authors' paper "Union Learning Representatives: Making the European area of lifelong learning a reality?" presented at the HRD conference in Toulouse, May 2003 (see proceedings and catalogue of references: Rodgers et al. 2003)

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